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United States Department of Agriculture
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
Program Aid No. 1673

National Smuggling Interdiction and Trade Compliance Program

Safeguarding U.S. Borders
Against Invasive Species





Millions of containers of produce are legally imported into the United States every year.

Protecting America From Agricultural Smugglers

Today's global economy has resulted in an increasing number of legal imports into the United States. Unfortunately, illegal agricultural imports have proliferated as well. Agricultural smugglers place America at great risk. They may introduce plant and animal pests and diseases or alien invasive species into the United States. These invasive species could do massive damage to America's crops, livestock, and environment; eradicating them could cost millions of dollars.

Cover photo: PPQ inspectors must document the country of origin of agricultural products because it is difficult to tell the difference between legally and illegally imported fruit by visual inspection alone. To the average person, smuggled products look the same as products safely and legally sold here.



PPQ inspectors monitor air cargo shipments, which are a potential pathway for invasive plant and animal pests and diseases to enter the United States.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is responsible for regulating the entry of agricultural commodities into the United States. In response to the growing volume of smuggled agricultural products, APHIS' Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ) unit created the Smuggling Interdiction and Trade Compliance (SITC) Program. SITC cooperates with Agriculture Canada's Canadian Food Inspection Agency, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Postal Service, the U.S. Customs Service, the U.S. Border Patrol, and USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service and Office of the Inspector General. The Program also works closely with a number of State departments of agriculture, State law enforcement agencies, and agriculture industry groups.

SITC officers ensure compliance with U.S. agricultural import laws. Complementing the work of PPQ inspectors at U.S. ports of entry, SITC officers discover and close the pathways through which prohibited commodities might enter the United States.

Throughout the year, SITC personnel, along with PPQ inspectors, conduct blitzes—or intensified inspections of cargo, passenger vehicles, mail packages, or baggage—at ports-of-entry across the United States. These blitzes often take place during high traffic periods, such as Memorial Day weekend or Thanksgiving. In just one blitz, SITC confiscated more than 3,000 pounds of illegal agricultural products.

SITC personnel also examine produce at U.S. markets and trace the source of any smuggled produce found there. Sometimes vendors do not even realize they are selling prohibited items. SITC officers work with vendors to explain Federal regulations and trace the pathway for the illegal importation. The individual or company responsible for importing smuggled produce is prosecuted. From January through June 2001, SITC officers conducted more than 5,000 market inspections throughout the United States.



Trucks bring in millions of tons of agricultural cargo every year, and PPQ personnel inspect these shipments at border stations like this one in Otay Mesa, CA.



Larvae of exotic fruit flies—one group of agricultural pests APHIS is concerned with keeping out of this country—are often invisible to the naked eye but make fruit rotten and inedible.



PPQ inspectors seize a great variety of prohibited agricultural products every day.

Tasked with bringing smugglers to justice, SITC officers seize and destroy all prohibited materials at the lawbreakers' expense. If warranted, APHIS also pursues civil or criminal penalties. The agency's efforts have led to grand jury indictments and Federal sentencing, hundreds of thousands of dollars in fines, and seizures of prohibited agricultural products valued at several million dollars.

Because exceptionally large volumes of commodities are smuggled into California and Florida, special State-Federal agricultural units have been established in those States. PPQ teamed with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and with the California Department of Food and Agriculture to form groups that work cooperatively to stop agricultural smuggling in those States.

High-Risk Produce

Many fruits and vegetables cannot be imported into the United States if they are from countries with exotic diseases and pests that could devastate U.S. agriculture. For instance, citrus canker, an extremely contagious bacterial disease that affects citrus, is not native to this country. Infection may produce a variety of effects, including defoliation, dieback, badly blemished fruit, reduced fruit quality, and premature fruit drop. Since 1995, when citrus canker was accidentally introduced into Florida, APHIS and the State of Florida have destroyed more than 2 million infected citrus trees, including 1.8 million trees in commercial groves.

Certain other species of exotic pests that feed on fruits, nuts, and vegetables could seriously harm the Nation's agricultural industry, trade, economy, and food supply. For example, APHIS has spent millions of dollars eradicating various species of fruit flies from California, Florida, and Texas over the past few years.



Smuggled fruits and vegetables may be offered at local retail markets.

Every year, PPQ intercepts an increasing number of high-risk agricultural products that are either prohibited or can be brought into the United States only under restricted conditions. Some of the commonly intercepted high-risk commodities include avocado, citrus, durian, guava, kaffir lime, litchi, longan, mango, papaya, rambutan, red rice, star apple, tejocote, and pomelo.

Meat and Meat Products

Animal disease organisms can live for months in meat and meat products, such as sausage and some canned hams sold abroad. Foot-and-mouth disease, bovine spongiform encephalopathy, and classical swine fever are a few of the livestock diseases that could cost billions to eradicate if they became established in the United States.

All commercial meat shipments must be accompanied by official meat-inspection certificates from the government of the country of origin. These certificates identify the country of origin and the specific processing method used. The type of acceptable processing varies, depending on the animal disease status of the country from which the meat originated. SITC officers



PPQ inspectors search imported agricultural products for hitchhiking agricultural pests like beetles, noxious weeds, worms, and snails.

seized approximately 62,000 pounds of illegal imported meat and meat products during the first 6 months of 2001.

Other Threats

American agriculture is also threatened by alien noxious weeds. Each year, farmers and ranchers spend more than \$5 billion to control invasive noxious weeds. Homeowners spend millions more each year trying to control these weeds. Yellow starthistle, exotic bur reed, giant salvinia, tropical soda apple, and water spinach are just a few foreign weeds damaging our agricultural resources today.

Additional Information

Smuggled agricultural products affect every U.S. resident. APHIS needs everyone's help in protecting America's vital resources. If you suspect any agricultural smuggling, please contact your regional SITC coordinator or the USDA Import Permit Unit immediately. Your confidentiality will be maintained.

If you have any questions about the SITC program or if you want to report smuggling activity, please call one of the following numbers:

National Hotline:	(800) 877-3835
SITC Eastern Region:	(919) 716-5594
SITC Western Region:	(970) 494-2531
SITC California:	(323) 881-6961
SITC Florida:	(305) 526-2501

If you have questions about the legal importation of plant and animal products into the United States, contact the USDA Import Permit Unit at (301) 734-8645 or check the APHIS Website at www.aphis.usda.gov/oa/imex.html. For recorded traveler information, call 1-866-SAFEGUARD.

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